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News Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Date: March 11, 2009

Increased Rabies Activity Reported

A total of nine rabid foxes have been found in multiple locations in the Flagstaff area since November 2008. In addition, two foxes found in December 2008 and February 2009 in the Coconino County region of Sedona tested positive for rabies.

Most recently, Coconino County Health Department (CCHD) officials confirmed reports of an aggressive fox located approximately ¼ mile from Grave Site and Elden Springs near Mt. Elden in Flagstaff. Three individuals reported encounters with the animal. The fox attempted to attack the individuals and their pets.

CCHD Animal Management staff and Flagstaff Animal Control captured the fox. It tested positive for rabies at the Arizona Department of Health Services State Laboratory on March 10, 2009. The persons involved in this incident were able to kick the fox away to avoid exposure. Two dogs were attacked by the fox and are currently under quarantine for observation. A second fox found dead on Mt. Elden Trail also tested positive for rabies on March 10, 2009.

Two more dead foxes were collected this week on the Mt. Elden Trail System. Test results are expected by Friday.

State law requires that dogs be leashed and kept from running at large. This includes dogs on Forest Service trail system. Officials will be walking trails in the area and ticketing individuals that have their dogs off leash. This provision also includes land under the control of both State and Federal government. There are several signs posted by the US Forest Service throughout the trail system as reminders of this law.

The increased rabies activity in the wild animal population in the Flagstaff area has prompted health officials to begin discussions regarding a possible rabies pet quarantine and vaccine bait distribution program. Because foxes become very aggressive when rabid, there is a high level of concern regarding public safety and the safety of domestic animals as well. Meetings with partner agencies, including the US Forest Service, United

States Department of Agriculture, Arizona Game and Fish Department and CCHD, are scheduled and will help to determine the best strategies to address the situation. Details regarding these plans will be available in the coming weeks.

Health officials are reminding the public to use caution while engaging in outdoor activities and to always avoid any wild animal, particularly one that appears to be sick, is dead, or is behaving in a strange manner.

The following precautions will help to reduce risk of exposure to rabies:

- Avoid any wild animals. People who feed or handle wild animals, and pets coming into contact with wild animals, risk possible exposure to rabies.
- **If hiking with a dog, keep it on a leash no more than six feet in length. Do not let your dog wander freely on the trails as it could come into contact with a wild animal, increasing its risk of exposure to rabies.**
- Bring a trekking pole or walking stick with you on your hikes throughout the Mt. Elden Trail System. If you see a fox near you, turn around and go the other way. Do not run. Walk slowly and keep an eye on the fox to ensure it is not following you. If a fox runs at you, use your trekking pole or walking stick to stun the fox and move as quickly as you can out of the area. If you do not have anything with you to defend yourself, kick the fox and move out of the area. Remember normal behavior in a fox is shyness and avoiding any human or domestic interaction. If a fox is coming at you or at your dog something is wrong.
- Report any unusual behavior. Call CCHD Animal Management at 928-679-8756. After hours call the Sheriff's Department at 928-774-4523 immediately. Be sure to give very specific directions to the person taking your information and a contact number so the officer can contact you.
- If you are bitten by a fox or other wild animal immediately go to the hospital and inform the staff of your situation. The hospital staff will contact the appropriate agency to collect the animal. Try to give specific directions to the agency investigator to ensure they can locate the animal.
- Have your pet vaccinated against rabies. Arizona State law requires all dogs to be properly vaccinated and licensed. It is also strongly recommended that cats be vaccinated against rabies. Vaccinations are available at local veterinarians or at periodically scheduled CCHD Rabies Vaccination Clinics.

The CCHD Animal Management office conducts an active program to monitor for rabies. Wild animals found dead are routinely tested in order to monitor rabies in those populations. Pets, including dogs and cats, that come into contact with wild animals may be quarantined until it can be determined if they are adequately vaccinated or were not exposed to rabies.

For more information, call Coconino County Health Department Animal Management at (928) 679-8756.

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